

DIASPORIC SENSIBILITY IN MANJU KAPUR'S IMMIGRANT

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ABSTRACT

Manju Kapur's *Immigrant* (2009) deals with Nina a lecturer, 30 years old, unmarried and staying with her mother in Delhi. She gets married with a N.R.I doctor Ananda and went to Canada as a newlywed wife. Here the writer deals with the life of a married woman all alone in an alien land where Indian culture and individualism has often remained alien ideas. Marital bliss, women's role at home and their change of attitude is the central focus. The Indian bride in Canada is a phase where the butterfly begins to lose its colour. There is loneliness and a feeling of being uprooted from the place of origin and only a husband to talk with. At the end, readers find a complete change in the personality and mental status of Nina. She develops a new attitude towards life and was moving ahead with a new career and job.

KEYWORDS: Individualism, Marital, Focus, Loneliness, Uprooted, Personality, Attitude, Career

INTRODUCTION

Manju Kapur is a novelist of international repute. With five critically acclaimed novels to her credit- *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant*, and *Custody*, she stands out from the rest of the writers of her age. She was awarded the prestigious Commonwealth Award for first fiction from the Asian region in 1999 for *Difficult Daughters*. *A Married Woman*, *Home* both shortlisted for the Hutch Crossword Prize for fiction, and *The Immigrant* was shortlisted for the DSC Prize. *Immigrant* deals with the major theme of diaspora and immigrant issues. A modern writer with modern views and concept.

The word 'Diaspora' originated from the Greek word, 'Diaspora' meaning, 'a dispersion'. Diaspora may be defined as dispersion of people, language or culture that was formerly concentrated in one place. The adjective diasporic from diaspora stands for every immigrant who has migrated to different countries across the globe seeking better fortunes. Wherever they go, these migrants carry with them a profound sense of attachment with their former place of residence. Diaspora aims to examine the displacement or dislocation as well as conflict between generations and cultural identity. The immigrant souls are always found to be divided. The focus of the paper is how Manju Kapur's characters in her novel, in spite of their divided souls try to construct their identity as Indian diasporas in the US.

The story set in seventies, it begins with Nina, a thirty-year-old frustrated English lecturer who lives in New Delhi with her widowed mother. Her mother wants Nina to marry an NRI and settle in some foreign country. Nina is uncertain and in desperation to move somewhere. Meanwhile she gets the proposal of Ananda Sharma an NRI dentist in Halifax, Canada. Nina wants to escape from the maternal and social pressure so she abandons her teaching career

and marries Ananada and moves to Canada. Ananada is a new immigrant who slowly adopted the new life in Canada. He marries Nina because the bond comes on his way to give a completion.

The song of diaspora begins its tune when the couple flew to Canada with the hope of living a better life. The moment the immigrant leaves their homeland they are alienated and become the victim of double consciousness. They get introduced to new culture, values, language, people, time, environment, and attitude. Though they know that life in abroad is full of problems and mayhem because of economic, social and racial discrimination they take life for granted in the land of opportunities. People do migrate, settle somewhere but this action causes a number of reactions and finally they lose their identity. Ananda is also a one such victim, because when he goes to Canada for the first time and his stay in his uncle's house elaborates his alienation and pain to us. From his very childhood he was praised for his perfection in doing things and for being so good. But in Canada his uncle instructs him to keep manners, clean the bathroom and do all his work by himself. He was not treated as a privileged person even by his close relative. In later period, Ananda has learnt how people and life is in new place. He takes life for granted, starts to behave like a Canadian he gets familiar with the dressing, food and people. But still he is very conscious Indian who respects his culture. When he gets an opportunity to date with Sue, a Canadian lady, she provokes him to have a physical relationship but he refuses and even when his manhood is questioned he does not give up his morals. This incident drives him to choose his partner from his homeland. He wants a girl of his nativity and culture so that he could be familiar and she will not dominate or question his manhood like the Canadian lady. The insecurity of Ananada and his search for a strong hold, a comfortable companion to survive in unfamiliar circle drives him to marry Nina, a lovely Indian woman.

Bride who gets married to an NRI flies to foreign land with great hope and when the flight takes off many things in her life too takes a different turn which she never expects. Nina too is not an exception of this diasporic case.

It is really not a myth that every easterner is ill-treated in western side. Centuries before Abraham Lincoln fought against the slavery and abolished it. He does not want the southern people to be in slavery and so he fought the civil war and won it. Of course, southern is not in slavery but Indians, the eastern soul is humiliated in western land. The reason for this discrimination may be race, colour, or nationality, but this inequity and injustice continues for generations. In this novel, Nina, the protagonist faces such a situation when she reaches Toronto. An enquiry takes place at the immigration clearance counter, where a number of questions raised on her about her belongings and she was treated in a suspicious manner. She becomes restless and faces great embarrassment feels lonely for the first time having her silent husband by her side. After sometime she asks Ananda, why they don't treat a European or American like that and why that happens to her alone. Often the diasporic people undergo this repression and bigotry when they start their life in the foreign land. Incidents like this, drives the immigrant to lose their identity just to survive in the new country.

The settlement and compromises becomes easy to Ananda when it is compared to Nina. As the days go by Ananda even changes his name and wants everyone to call him 'Andy'. Nina is no better than the caged bird. As she gets introduced to new people, surroundings, language and food, her disagreement drives her to isolation. Ananda takes Nina to his uncle's house to have dinner and to make her feel comfortable. Ananda never forces her to take western style of dressing; he admires and wants her to dress traditionally. Nina too is comfortable in wearing sari and jewels and she is proud of her identity. Sue and Garry appreciates her beauty whereas, Ananada's uncle who is of Indian

origin insults her and there she feels like 'fish out of water'. After all these happenings, the diasporic sensibility is well tuned all along the plot of the fiction to give a melodious song.

Nina's hostility and her fight against all odds take a convincing conclusion. To get acquainted with people and to become familiar in her surroundings Nina starts to wear jeans and t-shirt. Even though, she is not comfortable in her western outfit but she does not give up the new trend and arrival. Just to make friends and for her survival she mislay her identity and most valued culture.

Home bird Nina faces multiple problems in the new environment. Even after changing her outlook she is not able to convince people and gain respect. Before marriage she was identified as lecturer but things are different in new place. She is no more a lecturer; she is identified as Nina Sharma and not by her individuality. Sue, suggests her to come out of her non-working and disrespectful status and encourages her to join two year Library Science Course. But this economic independence introduces Nina to many other inner conflicts.

Apart from the migration issues, the couple's family life, culture and marital fidelity is challenged in an alienated place. Indians are known to value their morals and ethics but their attitude changes when they are in foreign land. As people get introduced to new set up, their values too degenerate. They fail to decide by their attitude they live to please everyone and they lose their identity become a perfect example of 'the survival of the fittest'. Nina and Ananda both fail to treasure their married life. Neither of them misses the opportunity to be unfaithful. At the early stage of their marriage Ananda fails to satisfy the physical needs of Nina. His impotency is hidden by lies. He never takes any step to fill the vacuum in his married life. Instead, he flirts and enjoys the relationship with Mandy. The same thing happens with Nina, she encounters Anton, a guy from New York, who never misses an opportunity to appreciate and please Nina. That's the trick and it is played well on her. The relationship seems to be platonic in the beginning but in aspiring the new world and adventures Nina forgets her entity and enjoys cigarette smoking, alcohol and all the pub activity like a Canadian. Thereby, Nina is trapped and she surrenders herself to Anton more like experiencing the difference and establishing her independency. Not even a pinch of regret is noticed in her. When she tries to come out of his relationship she is raped by Anton, and Nina is just shocked and does not react more than that. Nina's quest for freedom and independent life made her to believe people easily. Nina's sudden change of eating non-vegetarian and moving with new entities ruins her life. Indian values and morals are buried in foreign soil.

Nina and Ananda never came forward to sort out things. They continued to live together with ego and misunderstanding and they never felt the guilt. They carried on their relationship with Anton and Mandy respectively without the knowledge of one's deception of the other. They both started to eat non-vegetarian, Nina's sari changed to jeans and t-shirt, hair colour changed to yellow and now she is no more in cultural castle or religious taboo. Glitter and the taste of western life dominate her sense. Just to be independent, she loses her modesty. Now she becomes a good example of western woman.

Nina experiences the toughest phase in her life, when she comes to know of her mother's death. She visits India, she witnesses the rituals and remembers the days spent with her mother, morals that were taught to her, and the bond she had with the nation and its values moved her to tears. Nina avoided meeting her friends; the sense of guilt pre-dominated her soul. In the journey of exploring a new life style Nina lost her identity. Before she returns Canada she decides not to commit the sin again. Manju Kapur has beautifully brought out the pride of Indian culture in diasporic theme.

Immediately after her return from India, she finds a blond hair on the pillow and there after the mystery of Ananda's relationship with Mandy comes to light. Nina takes some time to decide her life and she wants to end up the hide and seek game which was played between them. Bold Nina wants to get rid of all the dirt and decides to make a fresh start to which Ananada did not react much. Nina gives up her western life and marriage. She begins to search for job at the University of New Brunswick. Whether she will get back to Halifax is not revealed by the author. Nina is a new woman who wants to make a fresh start to correct and forget her past mistakes. Whether she will be a Canadian, Indian or global woman, the choice is left to the reader. All we know from Kapur is Nina's changeover and like an eagle she renews her strength and identity to fly high above all the immigrants who are still suppressed in foreign land.

CONCLUSIONS

Manju Kapur has interwoven the theme of Diaspora throughout the novel. Life of immigrants and their problems in adopting and adapting is clearly pictured in this work. Immigrants face many problems in a foreign land. They don't find a way to fight against all the odds and stand firm without flaw. Instead, they take it as an opportunity to be a part of the new world. They live to survive; their survival is based on their changing attitude. Every decision they make to please the people around them gets them ruin. When they realize the mistake or the identity they lost in aspiring the new world, they don't bravely come out of the deceptive world. When Nina realized her mistake she bravely decides to begin a new life. Her change of attitude, acceptance of the truth and quest for identity has made all the difference in her life. I conclude this paper saying, that the concept of diaspora continues till there is a change of attitude in every immigrant.

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